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TECH

Twitter layoffs: Elon Musk addresses loss of ad revenue, claims that 'nothing has worked'

Danielle Echeverria, Sabrina Pascua, Chase DiFelicianantonio, Aidin Vaziri, Annie Vainshtein

Updated: Nov. 4, 2022 7:14 p.m.

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Bicycle riders ride their bikes on Market Street past Twitter headquarters at 1355 Market Street on Friday, November 4, 2022 in San Francisco, Calif.

Lea Suzuki/The Chronicle/The Chronicle

After his \$44 billion takeover of the company, [Elon Musk has begun laying off](#) as many as half of the company's 7,500 employees Friday morning. He said he will require the remainder of employees to come into the office again, according to multiple reports, a sharp reversal of the company's current work from home forever policy.

As news of the massive layoffs reverberate across the Twittersphere, we are tracking the latest updates and impacts on the San Francisco Bay Area.

Latest updates:**The emotional toll of being laid off**

Twitter layoffs are likely to exact an emotional toll, [according to the Washington Post](#). Several studies show that when people become unemployed they are more likely to experience poorer health and increased stress. Depression and anxiety are common. In some cases, losing a job can lead to substance use and suicidal thoughts. Even the stress of impending layoffs can take a toll. In one study, mass layoffs were associated with lower birth weights in babies. The effect was strongest when layoffs occurred later in a woman's pregnancy. The effect was also seen one to four months before layoffs were announced, ostensibly because people knew the job cuts were coming.

Musk threatens to go “thermonuclear” on advertisers

Encouraged by one of his 114 million followers on Friday to call out advertisers who pull their ads from Twitter in the wake of Elon Musk's takeover of the social media company, the newly minted CEO replied, “A thermonuclear name & shame is exactly what will happen if this continues.”

In an earlier tweet, Musk blamed activists for what he described as a “massive drop in revenue” since he took over Twitter late last week.

Insider Intelligence analyst Jasmine Enberg told the Associated Press there is “little Musk can say to appease advertisers when he's keeping the company in a constant state of uncertainty and turmoil, and appears indifferent to Twitter employees and the law.”

“Musk needs advertisers more than they need him,” she said. “Pulling ads from Twitter is a quick and painless decision for most brands.”

Twitter lays off 784 employees in S.F., according to filings

San Francisco District 6 Supervisor Matt Dorsey said in a press release that Twitter had filed a notice with city officials Friday informing them that the company would lay off 784 employees at its San Francisco offices beginning Jan. 4, 2023. Elon Musk has said on Twitter that employees were offered three months’ severance pay as the company loses what he said was \$4 million daily. That could explain why many employees reported being locked out of company systems already on Thursday and Friday. Musk is facing a lawsuit for failing to file the required notices with the state of a sizable layoff.

The notice sent to the state’s Employment Development Department, Mayor London Breed, and the city’s Workforce Development Board showed a breakdown of what jobs were affected. The majority of them, 592, were classified only as “Professionals.” Additionally 147 first or mid-level officials and managers, 25 administrative support workers, 11 sales workers, and nine executive and senior-level officials and managers were also to be terminated.

The filings also show Twitter let go of 106 employees in San Jose, and 93 in Los Angeles.

Musk breaks silence, says he had “no choice” but to cut workforce

In a tweet late Friday afternoon, new Twitter CEO Elon Musk attempted to address some of the rumors about widespread layoffs at the social media company, saying he had “no choice” but to make drastic cuts to the workforce.

“Regarding Twitter’s reduction in force, unfortunately there is no choice when the company is losing over \$4M/day,” Musk said, without elaborating on the company’s financial operations. “Everyone exited was offered 3 months of severance, which is 50% more than legally required.” Those figures were not verified by sources other than Musk.

The company had told workers by email that they would find out Friday if they had been laid off, the Associated Press reported. It did not say how many of the roughly 7,500 employees would lose their jobs. The email to staff said job reductions were “necessary to ensure the company’s success moving forward.”

Several employees who tweeted about losing their jobs said Twitter also eliminated their entire teams, including one focused on human rights and global conflicts, another checking Twitter’s algorithms for bias in how tweets get amplified, and an engineering team devoted to making the social platform more accessible for people with disabilities.

Core moderation capabilities “remain in place,” says head of safety

In an attempt at damage control on Friday afternoon, Elon Musk retweeted a thread from Twitter’s head of safety and integrity, calling it an “excellent summary” of where things stand at the social media company.

“While we said goodbye to incredibly talented friends and colleagues yesterday, our core moderation capabilities remain in place,” Yoel Roth said. He added that while Twitter slashed 15% of the trust and safety workforce — compared to approximately 50% of employee cuts company-wide — the 2,000 front-line moderation staff were among the least impacted. “More than 80% of our incoming content moderation volume was completely unaffected by this access change. The daily volume of moderation actions we take stayed steady through this period,” Roth said.

He added that the company was dedicated to maintaining its integrity heading into the midterm elections. “With early voting underway in the US, our efforts on election integrity — including harmful misinformation that can suppress the vote and combatting state-backed information operations — remain a top priority,” he said.

Roth noted that the layoffs have mostly impacted account access issues, such as aiding with lost password requests and reviewing appeals for suspended accounts. “We’re working to get these back online in the days to come,” he said, closing the thread with an appeal to recruiters to reach out with job openings. “I have recommendations for incredibly smart and compassionate talent that is now available.”

Musk added in a separate tweet, “Again, to be crystal clear, Twitter’s strong commitment to content moderation remains absolutely unchanged. In fact, we have actually seen hateful speech at times this week decline below our prior norms, contrary to what you may read in the press.”

Cost of blue check verification discounted to \$7.99

Among the many details that have emerged from Elon Musk’s guest appearance at an investment conference on Friday, it appears the price of verification has been discounted from the previously reported \$8 buy-in fee. Wrapping up his conversation with investment banker Ron Baron, the world’s richest man urged conference attendees to subscribe to the company’s paid service Twitter Blue, which gives all users the ability to have verified blue check mark status for a monthly fee. “Please use Twitter and please subscribe to Twitter verified: eight bucks. Actually, it’s technically \$7.99, so slightly less.”

NAACP urges all companies to pull advertising, saying it’s not “rocket science”

Derrick Johnson, the president of the NAACP, issued a statement on Friday calling on all companies to pull their ads from Twitter. “It is immoral, dangerous, and highly destructive to our democracy for any advertiser to fund a platform that fuels hate speech, election denialism and conspiracy theories. Until actions are taken to make this a safe space, we call on companies to pause all advertising on Twitter,” Johnson said on Friday. He had met with new Twitter CEO Elon Musk earlier this week to “express our grave concerns with the dangerous, life-threatening hate and conspiracies that have proliferated under his watch.”

Musk owning Twitter could trigger massive changes across social media

On the Fifth & Mission podcast, Emily Dreyfuss, the co-author of “Meme Wars: The Untold Story of the Online Battles Upending Democracy in America,” joins host Cecilia Lei to talk about how Elon Musk may fundamentally change Twitter — and how that might in turn change the entire social media landscape.

Dreyfuss says that Musk’s takeover of Twitter may inspire the development of more social media outlets, shaking up an ecosystem dominated by huge apps like Facebook, Instagram, TikTok — and Twitter.

“And if that happens,” Dreyfuss says, “that will undermine the monopolistic power of these platforms. And then that would have cascading impacts on our culture and on our politics.”

Musk on advertiser fallout: “Nothing has worked”

Elon Musk appeared to lament his purchase of Twitter at a conference in New York on Friday, noting that it is a “poorly managed business” and that he tried to back out of the \$44 billion deal to purchase the social media company.

In a conversation with investment banker Ron Baron at the 29th Annual Baron Investment Conference, Musk said he bought the social media company “on the basis of what it could become,” [according to Forbes](#).

Musk also shrugged off the loss of advertising revenue from large corporations such as General Mills and Volvo, claiming he did his “absolute best to appease them,” but “nothing has worked.” He justified the widespread layoffs at the company while he was onstage by saying Twitter “was having pretty serious revenue and cost challenges,” and [agreed with a tweet](#) saying it had “the worst ad platform of any social media company.” Forbes estimated on Friday that Musk’s worth stands at \$210.3 billion, making him the world’s richest person.

Social platform Mastodon says it gained 230K users amid Twitter fallout

[Mastodon](#), a decentralized social network platform that promises users more control over what they see on their feeds, [tweeted](#) that it has gained 230,000 users in the last week, including 70,000 users the day after Elon Musk took control of Twitter alone, bringing the company’s total number of active users to 655,000.

“Let’s keep the momentum going!” the company tweeted. “The ‘public square’ of the web must not belong to any one person or corporation!”

The 6-year-old company allows users to join servers whose content rules they agree with or create their own, which allows them to avoid things like hate speech or threats that they might get on other websites, [the Guardian reported](#), though users can still interact with people on other servers.



Next Up: California storm: 'Widespread significant flooding'...

their experience using the platform. “I’m

MUSK THREATENS TO GO “THERMONUCLEAR” ON ADVERTISERS

MUSK BREAKS SILENCE, SAYS HE HAD “NO CHOICE” BUT TO CUT WORKFORCE

The speed of the layoffs at Twitter could open Elon Musk and the social media company up to discrimination claims if it turns out, for instance, that they disproportionately affected women, people of color or older workers, a prominent employment lawyer told the [Associated Press](#).

Peter Rahbar, the founder of the New York law firm The Rahbar Group, said most employers “take great care in doing layoffs of this magnitude.” “First, they want to make sure there is justification, and second that a non-discriminatory process is used,” Rahbar, said. “And third, they want to do everything they can not to draw attention to it for these reasons.” Rahbar added, “For some reason, he wants to lay off half the company without doing any due diligence on what these people do or who they are and without any regards to the law.”

Musk dodges layoff question at NYC conference

Elon Musk didn’t confirm or correct investor Ron Baron at a conference in New York on Friday when he asked the billionaire Tesla CEO how much money he would save after he “fired half of Twitter,” according to the [Associated Press](#). Musk responded by talking about Twitter’s cost and revenue challenges and blamed “activists” who urged big companies to halt advertising on the platform. Musk hasn’t commented on the layoffs themselves. “The activist groups have been successful in causing a massive drop in Twitter advertising revenue, and we’ve done our absolute best to appease them and nothing is working,” he said.

In a tweet Friday, Musk said the group's efforts caused a "massive drop in revenue" since he took over Twitter late last week, though he did not elaborate about the company's financial situation.

Twitter team working on ethical AI laid off, engineer says

After Twitter's former director of machine learning ethics, transparency, and accountability Rumman Chowdhury [posted screenshots](#) last night of her apparently locked out account showing she was part of the company's layoffs, another senior engineer posted that the entire team had been laid off.

"Yep, the team is gone," [wrote](#) Joan Deitchman, whose LinkedIn now displays the #OPENTOWORK hashtag on her photo and shows her Twitter employment ended this month.

"The team that was researching and pushing for algorithmic transparency and algorithmic choice. The team that was studying algorithmic amplification. The team that was inventing and building ethical AI tooling and methodologies. All that is gone," Deitchman wrote.

Another former Twitter researcher on the team [wrote on the site](#) that the team had been laid off, "except one."

As Twitter lays off workers, U.S. job market sees solid month

The news that thousands of Twitter employees have been laid off came on the same day that the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics released its monthly report, showing that the U.S. economy added 261,000 jobs last month on a seasonally adjusted basis, less than the 315,000 added in October but stronger than many expected. The unemployment rate increased to 3.7% nationwide as federal regulators raise interest rates in an effort to cool inflation and slow the labor market.

Twitter cuts entire human rights team, former counsel says

Twitter has cut its entire global human rights team as part of its massive layoffs, according to a former employee. Shannon Raj Singh of San Francisco, the social media company's human rights counsel, said in a [tweet posted Friday](#) that her team's job was to protect at-risk individuals in global conflicts and crises in places such as Ukraine, Ethiopia and Afghanistan, based on the United Nation's Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights.

She added that they worked primarily to "defend the needs of those particularly at risk of human rights abuse by virtue of their social media presence, such as journalists & human rights defenders."

Yesterday was my last day at Twitter: the entire Human Rights team has been cut from the company.

I am enormously proud of the work we did to implement the UN Guiding Principles on Business & Human Rights, to protect those at-risk in global conflicts & crises including Ethiopia,

— Shannon Raj Singh (@ShannonRSingh) November 4, 2022

Mood mostly quiet outside of Twitter HQ in S.F.

By 9:30 a.m. Friday, the only major presence outside of the technology company's headquarters in the heart of Civic Center was a scrum of reporters and photographers trying to snag photos of anyone coming in or out of the building — most of whom were

security guards.

Walking outside of her apartment to look at the headquarters outside of the street, community activist Liza Murawski said she was “sick to her stomach” to hear about the mass layoffs affecting thousands of employees at Twitter amid the city’s worsening homelessness crisis and a historic building that now will be far emptier than it was before.

Employees walk past a lighted Twitter logo as they leave the company's headquarters in San Francisco.
Glenn Chapman / AFP / Getty Images

Here’s what a WARN act is, and what could happen if Twitter violates it

There are both federal and state WARN acts, and Twitter is liable under both, given its size. Both require a 60 day notice to various local officials and the Local Workforce Development Board when employees are laid off.

As of Friday, Musk and Twitter had not given this notice, according to a spokesperson for California’s Employment Development Department, [the Associated Press reported](#).

There are exceptions: under the federal law, notice is not required if it “is due to unforeseeable business circumstances, a natural disaster.” Under the state, notice is not required if it “is necessitated by a physical calamity or act of war.” Other provisions exist for seasonal labor or for when employees are transferred elsewhere.

If Twitter did violate both the state and federal WARN acts, as a lawsuit alleges, it would be on the hook for a number of fines. Federally, Twitter would have to pay employees back pay and benefits for the entire duration of the violation up to 60 days. On the state level, Twitter could also have to pay a civil penalty of \$500 a day for each day of violation. California’s law also specifies that employees must be back paid at their final salary or 3-year average salary, whichever is higher, and that the employer is liable for any medical costs employees incur during the violation period that would have been covered by their benefits.

Twitter can also be sued in federal and state court.

Twitter also had its own policy on layoffs, [the New York Times reported](#). An internal employee benefits summary notes that laid off Twitter workers should be paid at least two month's salary and the cash value they were scheduled to receive within three months of the layoff date. Musk agreed in his deal to acquire Twitter that he would keep employee compensation and benefits the same for at least one year, according to the Times.

Civil rights groups urge advertisers to pull out of Twitter

A coalition of civil rights groups is urging companies to stop advertising on Twitter after the social media company's new owner Elon Musk blamed a drop in revenue on "activist groups" and said they are "trying to destroy free speech in America." The coalition, called [#StopToxicTwitter](#), includes Media Matters, Free Press, Accountable Tech and Color of Change. Jessica González, co-CEO at Free Press, said in a statement on Friday that Musk had appeared to renege on his promise to "retain and enforce the election integrity measures that were on Twitter's books before his takeover" by dismissing the entire content moderation team on Friday.

"With today's mass layoffs, it's clear that Musk's actions betray his words," González said. Earlier this week, the [#StopToxicTwitter coalition publicly urged](#) Twitter's top 20 advertisers to inform Musk that they will suspend all advertising on the platform if he undermines the social network's established community standards.

Angelo Clarisonic of Media Matters said Musk was wrong to blame his advertising woes on others despite his chaotic takeover of the company. "He's obviously trying to set up a false choice here," Clarisonic said. "His threat is only, I think, going to escalate and increase the likelihood for more advertising to come because it just validates and reinforces the very concern that the coalition has."

Former Twitter CEO silent amid chaotic takeover

Twitter co-founder and former CEO Jack Dorsey has been silent on the site during the chaotic takeover by Musk and the ensuing layoffs, although he has previously said Musk is the right person to take Twitter forward.

Twitter Co-founder Evan Williams has [tweeted](#) his support for laid off employees. Dorsey has recently only tweeted about cryptocurrency projects, and has begun testing what he has pitched as a new, decentralized social media site called Bluesky that aims to be free of government influence and could potentially compete with Twitter.

SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA - OCTOBER 2: The Twitter logo is posted on the exterior of Twitter headquarters on October 28, 2022 in San Francisco, California. Elon Musk closed the deal to purchase social media platform Twitter for \$44 billion and has already fired several top executives. (Photo by Justin Sullivan/Getty Images) *** BESTPIX ***
Justin Sullivan/Getty Images

Musk attends investment conference in New York as employees pack up

Elon Musk was at an investment conference in New York City on Friday morning, as Twitter workers scrambled to find out more about their employment status. The world's richest man appeared as a featured guest at the [29th Annual Baron Investment Conference](#), where he was in conversation with CEO Ron Baron, who is also a shareholder at Tesla. Baron told [CNBC on Thursday](#) that the conversation would focus on the electric car company, as well as SpaceX, and Musk's agreement to provide Starlink internet service to Ukraine during the Russian invasion. "I don't want to do the interview in advance, but I think one of the interesting questions is that he's 51 years old and he works 16- or 17-hour days, seven days a week and he flies all over the place," Baron said. "He's the wealthiest man in the world. Why does he do this?"

Sen. Scott Wiener's calls Twitter layoffs "deeply concerning"

Sen. Scott Wiener, D-San Francisco, took to Twitter to admonish Musk's move to lay off half of Twitter's workforce. Wiener described Musk's actions, particularly for firing the executives responsible for enhancing user safety on the social media platform, as "deeply concerning."

Wiener added that the mass-fire "goes well beyond" layoffs due to economic challenges, and he expressed concern over what changes to the platform means for minority communities moving forward.

"Combined with Musk's signals that he will allow toxic accounts back onto the platform — thus leading to targeting and incitement of violence against LGBTQ people, Jews, people of color, and others — I see trouble ahead for Twitter, its users, and our democracy," Wiener wrote.

Twitter's curation team, responsible for Twitter Moments and creating Topics, reportedly been eliminated

Andrew Haigh, a manager on the curations team, tweeted Friday that his team is "no more," and linked to a webpage that describes the team's work.

The move concerned people who said the curation team's work helped add important context to tweets that went viral.

"This is the team that tried to contextualize trending topics, especially when they were rife with misinformation," [wrote NBC News Correspondent Jacob Ward](#).

General Mills, Audi are latest companies to pause Twitter ads

General Mills and Audi are the latest big advertisers to pause ads on Twitter as questions swirl about how the social media platform will operate under new owner Elon Musk. Spokesperson Kelsey Roemhildt on Thursday confirmed the move by the Minneapolis-based maker of food brands such as Cheerios and Annie's macaroni and cheese, the [Associated Press reports](#). "As always, we will continue to monitor this new direction and evaluate our marketing spend," she said. Audi spokesperson Whaewon Choi-Wiles said the German automaker is pausing ads and "will continue to evaluate the situation." Shortly before taking over the San Francisco company last week, Musk issued a vow to advertisers that he would not allow Twitter to [become a "free-for-all hellscape,"](#) but companies are concerned about [whether content moderation will remain](#).

Class action lawyer to Twitter: "Mr. Musk, the storm is coming"

Twitter employees filed a class action lawsuit in federal court Thursday evening in San Francisco, alleging Twitter violated state law by not providing the required notice ahead of Friday's massive layoffs.

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Check levels down to the neighborhood

Ratings for the Bay Area and California, updated every 10 minutes

"I'm now in contact with many Twitter workers who reached out to me about a class action lawsuit overnight," another lawyer who also alleged that Twitter violated state laws.

Twitter

— LisaBloom Twitter

Ahead of the layoffs, employees circulated a "[Layoff Guide](#)" which includes tips for employment rights, and one worker, who was later fired, created a software to help colleagues download important emails and documents, according to a [report by The New York Times](#). On Thursday, employees noticed changes to the workplace such as the employee directory getting taken offline. Workers were told that badge access would be suspended Friday and the offices will be temporarily closed, leaving many to likely find out about their job status at home.

Under the terms of his deal to acquire Twitter, Musk had agreed to keep employee compensation and benefits — which typically includes employee pay for at least two months' salary and the cash value of equity they were scheduled to receive within three months of a layoff date — the same for one year.

Matt Haney calls Twitter layoffs 'wrong, mean & dangerous'

“Slashing jobs by the thousands without notice at Twitter, a hostile “nightmare” work environment, creating instability on a site that people use to access critical information just days before an election — don’t defend or justify it, it’s wrong, mean & dangerous,” the California assemblymember [wrote on Twitter](#).

Twitter

— MattHaneySF Twitter

California EDD says it did not receive required advance notice of layoffs

California’s Employment Development Department said Friday it had not received advance notice of the massive layoffs at Twitter. The state’s [Worker Adjustment and Retraining Notification statute](#) requires employers with at least 100 workers to disclose layoffs involving 50 or more employees, regardless of whether a company is publicly traded or privately held. “Federal and California laws require companies to provide advance notice of mass layoffs—the federal WARN Act requires 60 days’ notice,” the agency told the New York Times. “As of last night, California’s Employment Development Department said it hadn’t received any such notice.”

Memo to Twitter employees acknowledges 'incredibly challenging experience'

A memo was shared with Twitter employees ahead of Friday’s massive layoff, which was [obtained and shared](#) by Bloomberg, acknowledging “an incredibly challenging experience” for employees who were blindsided by the abrupt staff cuts.

Read the memo here:

Team,

In an effort to place Twitter on a healthy path, we will go through the difficult process of reducing our global workforce on Friday. We recognize that this will impact a number of individuals who have made valuable contributions to Twitter, but this action is unfortunately necessary to ensure the company’s success moving forward.

Given the nature of our distributed workforce and our desire to inform impacted individuals as quickly as possible, communications for this process will take place via email. By 9AM PST on Friday Nov. 4th, everyone will receive an individual email with the subject line: Your Role at Twitter. Please check your email, including your spam folder.

If your employment is not impacted, you will receive a notification via your Twitter email. If your employment is impacted, you will receive a notification with next steps via your personal email.

If you do not receive an email from twitter-hr@ by 5PM PST on Friday Nov. 4th, please email peoplequestions@twitter.com.

To help ensure the safety of each employee as well as Twitter systems and customer data, our offices will be temporarily closed and all badge access will be suspended. If you are in an office or on your way to an office, please return home.

We acknowledge this is an incredibly challenging experience to go through, whether or not you are impacted. Thank you for continuing to adhere to Twitter policies that prohibit you from discussing confidential company information on social media, with the press or elsewhere.

We are grateful for your contributions to Twitter and for your patience as we move through this process.

Thank you.

Twitter

Twitter AI ethics expert apparently laid off

Twitter has apparently laid off Rumman Chowdhury, the company's director of machine learning ethics, transparency and accountability.

Chowdhury [posted a screenshot](#) of her company email account last night showing she could not login and later said “What a bittersweet phrase - not because I’m gone, but because it’s gone.” using the past tense of the #lovewhereyouwork hashtag. Chowdhury [published research](#) last year on how Twitter’s algorithm amplifies right-wing content.

Musk blames “activists” for “massive” drop in Twitter revenue

Amid ongoing tumult inside Twitter, Elon Musk [tweeted](#) that his critics are “trying to destroy free speech in America.”

He said that Twitter has seen a “massive drop in revenue” after “activist groups” pressured advertisers to leave the platform. “Extremely messed up! They’re trying to destroy free speech in America,” Musk tweeted.

Twitter has had a massive drop in revenue, due to activist groups pressuring advertisers, even though nothing has changed with content moderation and we did everything we could to appease the activists.

Extremely messed up! They’re trying to destroy free speech in America.

— Elon Musk (@elonmusk) November 4, 2022

Change in Twitter remote work policy could benefit one part of S.F.

As Musk strode into Twitter’s headquarters last week, there was one clear beneficiary amid the uncertainty. Chris Foley, who owns the Market grocery store and food hall on the ground floor of the headquarters building, said daily sales jumped from around \$9,500 to \$12,000, thanks to an influx of Twitter workers. Even as the layoffs hit the city in other ways, businesses like The Market in S.F.'s beleaguered Mid-Market area could see a boost, albeit from a much diminished workforce compared to before the pandemic. Read more about the [impact on S.F.'s Mid-Market here](#).

Twitter employees say goodbye after being cut off from emails

Twitter employees took to the social media site Thursday night to say they’d unexpectedly lost access to their work email and internal work communications accounts on the eve of massive layoffs planned by the company’s new CEO Elon Musk.

Many assumed the unexplained cut-off meant they lost their jobs, and began [sharing their goodbyes to fellow employees](#).

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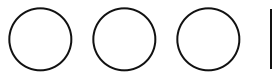
Layoffs at Lyft, Stripe, Opendoor and Chime add to Bay Area tech woes



Roland Li

Updated: Nov. 3, 2022 6:51 p.m.

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Bay Area tech layoffs start at Lyft, Stripe, Opendoor and Chime. A Lyft decal is seen through the window of a car outside the Cal Train station on Townsend Street in San Francisco in 2019.

Gabrielle Lurie / The Chronicle

UPDATE: [Why Meta is laying off 11,000 workers](#), and what it means for S.F.

The wave of [Bay Area tech layoffs](#) is growing, with four major rounds of cuts announced this week.

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Ride-hailing company Lyft is cutting 13% of its employees, or nearly 700 workers, according to a memo released Thursday. Stripe, an online payment processing company and the second most valuable private U.S. startup, is laying off around

14% of its staff, or more than 1,000 workers.

- **Live Updates:** [Elon Musk begins massive Twitter layoffs](#)

Earlier this week, digital bank Chime said it was laying off 12% of workers, or around 160 people. The startup, valued at \$25 billion, signed a major 192,000-square-foot lease at 101 California St. last year, in one of the only major downtown San Francisco office expansions of the pandemic.

San Francisco real estate tech firm Opendoor said it was [laying off 550 workers](#), or 18% of the company, as mortgage rates have skyrocketed and the housing market has softened.

Online retailer Amazon also said Thursday it would [pause corporate hiring](#) for the next few months.

Tech job listings have remained strong but have trended downward this year, with national active listings falling by around 100,000 compared to March, [according to tech trade group CompTIA](#).

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South San Francisco-based Stripe is cutting costs in response to an economic slowdown, after revenue and payment volume more than tripled during the pandemic, CEO Patrick Collison [wrote in an email to staff](#).

“We are facing stubborn inflation, energy shocks, higher interest rates, reduced investment budgets, and sparser startup funding,” Collison wrote.

Twitter Layoffs

- [Twitter layoffs live updates](#)
- [How massive Twitter layoff would impact S.F.](#)
- [Listen: What Elon Musk's Twitter takeover means for you](#)
- [On eve of mass layoffs, Twitter employees say goodbye](#)
- [Layoffs at Lyft, Stripe, Opendoor and Chime add to Bay Area tech woes](#)

The cuts will bring down the company’s head count to around 7,000 people, equivalent to its size in February. Stripe was valued at \$95 billion last year, behind only SpaceX’s \$127 billion, [according to research firm CB Insights](#). However, its internal valuation was reportedly [cut to \\$74 billion this year](#).

Collison said the company’s leadership was “too optimistic about the internet economy’s near-term growth in 2022 and 2023” and operating costs rose too quickly.

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Ratings for the Bay Area and California, updated every 10 minutes

The cuts will disproportionately affect some divisions, including recruitment, as the company plans to hire more slowly next year.

He said the company was still seeing growth, including 75% more new customers in the third quarter compared to the prior year, and a new record on daily payments volume processed this week.

Stripe [moved its headquarters](#) from San Francisco to South San Francisco's Oyster Point in 2019, saying at the time that San Francisco lacked enough office space real estate to expand. The office vacancy rate has since shot up during the pandemic from under 5% to a record high 25%.

Earlier this year, [Google](#) leased [Stripe's](#) former headquarters in South of Market in the San Francisco's biggest new lease of the pandemic to date. But even Google has paused hiring amid a decline in online ad spending.

One of the [biggest rounds of job cuts](#) in years could be coming Friday, when Twitter's new owner Elon Musk [reportedly plans to lay off](#) around 3,700 workers, or half the staff, according to Bloomberg.

*Roland Li is a San Francisco Chronicle staff writer. Email: roland.li@sfchronicle.com
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Roland Li covers commercial real estate for the business desk, focusing on the Bay Area office and retail sectors.

He was previously a reporter at San Francisco Business Times, where he won one award from the California News Publishers Association and three from the National Association of Real Estate Editors.

He is the author of "Good Luck Have Fun: The Rise of eSports," a 2016 book on the history of the competitive video game industry. Before moving to the Bay Area in 2015, he studied and worked in New York. He freelanced for the Wall Street Journal, the New York Times and other local publications. His hobbies include swimming and urban photography.

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The donor, it turned out, was MacKenzie Scott, who was in the process of giving away more than half of her \$27 billion in estimated net worth, much of it from her divorce from Amazon founder [Jeff Bezos](#).



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Amazon founder [Jeff Bezos](#) joined NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell on the sideline before kickoff. ..Los Angeles C Corey Linsley (knee) and RT Trey Pipkins III (ankle) left in the third quarter. ... Chiefs WR ...



Maya Rudolph strikes comedy gold as a billionaire in Apple TV+ series 'Loot'

June 23, 2022 | G. Allen Johnson

Using MacKenzie Scott — the San Francisco-born ex-wife of Amazon founder [Jeff Bezos](#), who landed a record \$32 billion divorce settlement in 2019 — as inspiration for the initial concept, Rudolph has a field day with Molly.



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BAY AREA

Will tech layoffs end the era of remote work? Here's what experts predict for 2023



Chase DiFelicianantonio

Updated: Dec. 25, 2022 4:28 p.m.

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CEO Larry Gadea (right), Jeremiah Johnson and Sarah Kelley, with her dog Pepper, work at Envoy's headquarters in San Francisco. Envoy, a workplace software company, has employees back in the office three days per week.

Salgu Wissmath / The Chronicle

This time last year in the Bay Area, it seemed plausible that office buildings could become a relic of the past for thousands of workers, with many in tech and other remote-friendly industries comfortably ensconced in home offices after close to two years of pandemic living.

But while the region's office market is in a slump, some local companies and national surveys show it is increasingly common for workers to show up a few days a week, a trend that is likely to continue into 2023.

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Envoy employees Dan Roderick (right) and Andrei Basmacov take calls inside the company's offices in San Francisco.
Salgu Wissmath/The Chronicle

For the past six months or more, many companies that embraced remote work out of necessity have settled into a two-or-three-day-per-week, in-office rhythm that could play out in the long term. And while a scorching-hot labor market may have given some managers pause in the past about urging skilled tech workers back to their cubicles, lest they flee for more flexible work environments, recent layoffs in the industry have tamped down some of those concerns.

So, experts said, remote working as it stands is likely to remain a feature of professional life for many in the Bay Area in 2023. As will the looming specter of layoffs, at least for the beginning of the year.

“I think we’ve landed in a much better place. ... It has been stable for the last six months,” said Nicholas Bloom, an economics professor at Stanford who studies remote working trends across the United States.

Bloom’s latest [research](#) shows that around 30% of paid workdays are done from home in the U.S., half of what they were during the first year of the pandemic. And that number seems likely to stay the same into next year and the foreseeable future.

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San Francisco office check-ins continue to hover around 40% of pre-pandemic levels, while San Jose is seeing a little over a third of offices occupied, according to data from Kastle Systems.

That is comparable to Los Angeles, but well below other large metro areas like Dallas and Austin, where the numbers are a dozen percentage points higher — or more.

CFO Sinohe Terrero and Executive Assistant Nicole Thayer meet at Enjoy's S.F. offices.
Salgu Wissmath / The Chronicle

Earlier in the pandemic, “a lot of companies said we’ll have a three-two hybrid plan,” where workers come in on the days of their choosing and work from home two or three days a week, Bloom said.

But that often created a host of problems, including people in the office struggling to collaborate over video or phone calls with those at home.

Nowadays, Bloom said people in professional and managerial roles tend to show up on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays. “If you want to watch the World Cup or it’s cold outside, that’s not a reason to not turn up,” Bloom said. “The reason is, if you don’t show up, it affects everyone else.”

One company that has slowly ramped up the number of days it is asking employees to be in the office is San Francisco software maker Envoy.

CEO Larry Gadea said the SoMa company has experimented with letting employees pick some of their days in office, but plans to require people to be in person Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays, starting in January.

“The idea is to make things more consistent,” and to make it easier to know when other people and other teams will be there in-person to collaborate, Gadea said. “We’re trying to get ahead of what the rest of the world is doing.”

The company’s software also captures hundreds of thousands of office check-ins weekly, and has found many metro areas are seeing increases in foot traffic compared with March 2020.

But companies aren’t making decisions about in-office time based strictly on worker happiness and retention, Bloom said.

“This is not a social movement,” he said. “It makes firms money.”

That is borne out in Bloom’s research, which has shown that workers value remote work roughly the same as an 8% pay raise on top of any cost-of-living raises they might get.

Simply put, many companies would rather give people more flexibility than increase their pay by that much.

Bloom’s research has also shown that workers are slightly more productive when given some days from home with the lack of a commute, and that the change makes it easier to diversify workforces and cuts down on the need for costly physical space.

“In a capitalist economy, anything that makes companies money tends to stick,” he said.

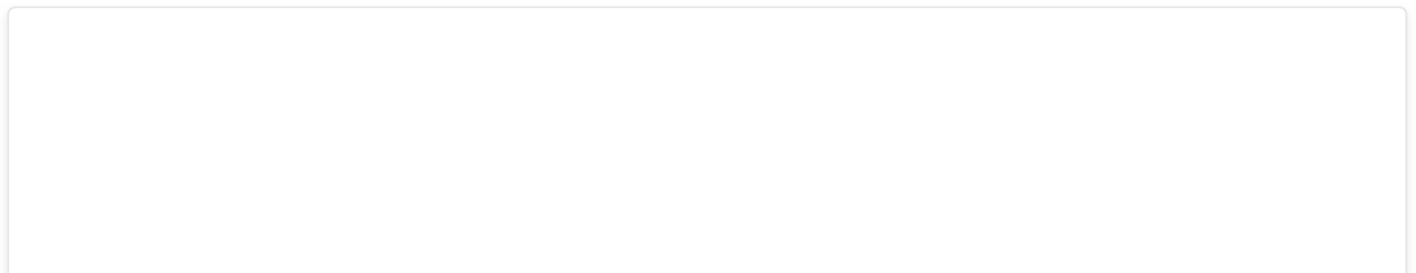
Not everyone, however, is so sure that remote work will stay the way it is.

Software maker Envoy has slowly increased the number of days it asks employees to be in the office. It will be three in January.

Salgu Wissmath / The Chronicle

That includes Julia Pollak, the chief economist at job site ZipRecruiter. She said that while the number of jobs advertising remote work has trended down on sites such as LinkedIn, that is “driven by a relative decline in tech job postings recently,” as opposed to a drawdown of remote work overall.

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She said about 11% of jobs on ZipRecruiter explicitly say they can be done remotely, compared with about 4% in 2019, and that about a quarter of all applications through the site currently go to those postings, many of which are for tech support, human resources and call-center jobs.

Pollak also said, with the current economic downturn, that the site has seen more people searching for jobs every day instead of casually logging in a few times a month. Periodic surveys run by the company also show people are less likely these days to negotiate an offer and more likely to accept the first one they get — both signs of a continually darkening sky for the labor market.

And while high-profile layoffs at [Twitter](#), [Meta](#), [Amazon](#) and other marquee Silicon Valley companies have grabbed headlines, Pollak said she doubts the worst of the job cuts are over.

“January is the No. 1 month for layoffs each year,” she said, speaking in the middle of December. “I expect similar numbers, if not greater numbers, of tech layoffs in December and January before things start to get better.”

Gadea at Envoy said his company of about 300 people doesn’t plan any layoffs at the moment, but the environment of rolling job cuts, particularly across the Bay Area tech industry, changes the calculus for companies pushing for more time in person.

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“I do think, these days, it is easier for companies to make harder decisions given the environment,” he said. “Companies are feeling a little more confident about making those decisions.”

The current layoffs don’t equate to a death knell for remote work, though.

Bloom pointed out that Elon Musk’s takeover of Twitter coincided not only with a layoff of around half of the company, but his directive that the company’s work-from-anywhere-forever policy was over for good.

When Musk sent out a now-infamous email to the remaining employees that they get on board with the new direction of the company, “so many people were

resigning, he had to apparently reverse his policy,” Bloom said.

And if an in-office die-hard like Musk, known for bragging about sleeping on office couches as a stand-in for a work ethic, can’t kick the remote work trend going forward, “most other firms won’t either,” Bloom said.

Chase DiFelicianantonio is a San Francisco Chronicle staff writer. Email: chase.difelicianantonio@sfchronicle.com Twitter: @ChaseDiFelice

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Written By

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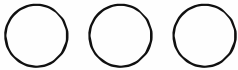
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News // Bay Area & State

Class Action Lawsuit Filed By Twitter Employees Over Planned Mass Layoffs

Nov. 4, 2022

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With mass layoffs underway this week at the San Francisco-based social media giant Twitter under new chief executive officer Elon Musk, some of the employees have filed a class action lawsuit alleging the layoffs violated state and federal labor laws.

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The suit filed Thursday in federal court in San Francisco by attorney Shannon Liss-Riordan on behalf of Twitter employees in the company's offices in San Francisco and Cambridge, Massachusetts, alleges that Musk's plans to lay off thousands of employees is not allowed under the federal Worker Adjustment and Retraining Notification (WARN) Act, as well as the state's WARN Act.

The federal law requires employers with 100 or more full-time employees to provide at least 60 calendar days' notice of a closure or layoff affecting 500 or more employees at a single site of employment.

One employee included in the lawsuit was notified earlier this week of his termination, while others were locked out of their accounts and more widespread layoffs were expected Friday.

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The suit says another Musk-owned company, the electric carmaker Tesla, engaged in similar violations earlier this year when he made mass layoffs there without advanced written notice.

Twitter should be subject to "notice and back pay requirements" under the labor laws, according to the suit.

The plans to lay off roughly half of Twitter's workforce were criticized by local politicians, including state Sen. Scott Wiener, D-San Francisco, who called Musk's moves "deeply concerning."

Wiener said, "While companies periodically engage in layoffs to acknowledge economic realities, firing a full half of employees goes well beyond that. Combined with Musk's signals that he will allow toxic accounts back onto the platform -- thus leading to targeting and incitement of violence against LGBTQ people, Jews, people or color, and others -- I see trouble ahead for Twitter, its users, and our democracy."

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52°**SIGN UP****LIVE****NEWS****‘Flush Musk’ protestors deliver toilet to Twitter HQ**by: [Tori Gaines](#), [Ella Sogomonian](#)

Posted: Oct 31, 2022 / 07:24 PM PDT

Updated: Oct 31, 2022 / 08:37 PM PDT

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SAN FRANCISCO (KRON) — A group of demonstrators headed out to Twitter headquarters on Monday afternoon, and they brought a special delivery with them.

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Protestors placed a toilet, decorated with photos of Elon Musk and former President Donald Trump, in front of Twitter HQ on Market Street in San Francisco. While they chanted “Flush Musk, dump Trump” they removed photos of Musk and President Trump and ripped them up before discarding them inside of the toilet bowl.

One of the demonstrators, Michael Petrelis, tells KRON4 that Musk's actions since taking over the company have been worrisome. "We do not trust Musk, who is an erratic billionaire. Since he bought Twitter there's been a rise in hate content and LGBT lies from Musk regarding the person accused of attacking Paul Pelosi," Petrelis said.

On Sunday Musk [tweeted a link to an unsubstantiated rumor](#) in regards to the attack on House Speaker Nancy Pelosi's husband. This tweet came just days after many spoke out against how he may handle misinformation and hate speech on the platform.

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After the tweet was posted and deleted, conspiracy theorists had already started spinning. The misinformation became so problematic by Monday morning that San Francisco Police Chief William Scott felt the need to set the record straight [in an interview on CNN](#). "There is absolutely no evidence that Mr. Pelosi knew this man, as a matter of fact the evidence indicates the exact opposite," Scott said.

Petrelis tells KRON4 he has concerns about what could happen next on the platform, especially when it comes to politics, "If Musk allows Trump back on Twitter, democracy will

be harmed,” he told KRON4.

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“As a gay Twitter user, I will remain on the platform to help keep it a safe global town square,” Petrelis said.

Last week, Musk cryptically announced his takeover of the company by [sauntering into Twitter HQ](#) with a sink. Musk captioned the video posted to Twitter by saying, “Entering Twitter HQ – let that sink in!”

The Associated Press contributed to this report.

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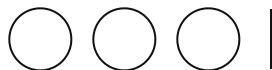
S.F. Mayor Breed slams Elon Musk and calls out Marc Benioff



Mallory Moench

Updated: Oct. 20, 2022 12:24 p.m.

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1 of 2

Mayor London Breed slammed Tesla CEO Elon Musk for taking his Tesla headquarters to Texas in a Bloomberg interview published Monday as the billionaire is poised to purchase San Francisco-based Twitter. Breed speaks during the Autumn Moon Festival in the Richmond district in September 2022.

Stephen Lam, Staff Photographer / The Chronicle

Mayor London Breed slammed Tesla CEO Elon Musk for taking his Tesla headquarters to Texas in an interview published Monday as the billionaire is poised to purchase San Francisco-based Twitter.

- **Read more:** Elon Musk might lay off 75% of Twitter staff after purchase. What does that mean for S.F.?

Breed also called out Salesforce co-CEO and San Francisco native Marc Benioff for his remote work policies, the likes of which she said have contributed to the devastation of downtown, although she acknowledged his support for local schools and other philanthropy.

Breed saved her ire in the Bloomberg story for Musk, who she called “the person who got a ton of tax breaks in California and decided to take that money and run.”

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Musk moved Tesla's headquarters from Silicon Valley to Austin, Texas, last year. He told a conservative site at the time that California was the land of overregulation, although he also said to shareholders, "This is not a matter of Tesla leaving

California." The company did expand office space in Palo Alto and said it expected to increase output at its Fremont factory by 50%.

Gov. Gavin Newsom also recently took aim at Musk, accusing him of fleeing California with a prosperous business propped up by the state. The Chronicle reported that Tesla received more than \$3.2 billion worth of direct and indirect California subsidies and market mechanisms since 2009.

Breed could find herself face to face with Musk soon if his embattled bid to take over Twitter succeeds. A judge ordered Twitter and Musk — who said he would buy the social media company, tried to back out, then changed his mind again — to seal the deal by Oct. 28 to avoid a trial.

If the deal goes through, Musk will be in charge of the San Francisco-based company and its Mid-Market offices. Earlier this year, Musk ran a poll in a now-deleted Tweet, asking his followers whether Twitter should convert its headquarters on Market Street, which it rents, into a homeless shelter "since no one shows up anyway." Over 90% of users who responded voted "yes."

Government subsidies have also benefited Twitter, with San Francisco's Mid-Market tax breaks boosting the company a decade ago. The company's former CEO

Jack Dorsey said that workers can stay remote forever, although Musk expressed skepticism about remote work.

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Tesla did not

Breed voiced concerns over more than other cities, saying it could hurt the city's budget, with more pain to come. But while Breed keeps criticizing remote work, her recent Bloomberg interview also revealed she's finally conceded that some tech workers will never return to the office. She's changed her tune since she rallied workers six months ago to "take the pajamas off" and get back downtown.

Breed told Bloomberg that tech companies allowing remote work are part of the

Breed told Bloomberg that tech companies allowing remote work are part of the problem facing the city.

Tracking by Kastle, a security firm, showed that workers were in offices at 42% of pre-pandemic levels in San Francisco this week, a lower percentage than eight other cities. The city's office vacancy — the amount of space available for lease or sublease — hit a record high 25% in the third quarter, according to real estate brokerage CBRE.

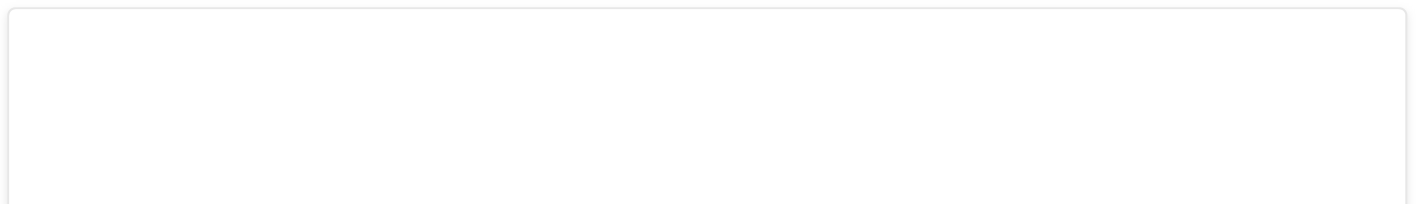
Breed said tech titans' remote work policies were part of the problem, specifically mentioning Salesforce, the city's largest private employer, and Benioff.

She acknowledged the native San Franciscan's philanthropy - over the past decade, his company's foundation gave \$110 million to San Francisco and Oakland schools alone, which he's promised to fund in perpetuity. But she also called out the company's flexible remote work policy, saying she's talked to Benioff about it multiple times.

"He's very supportive of the city, continues to contribute that support to schools and to other great causes, but the building is empty, and that's a real problem," she said. "Ultimately I can't force or mandate, right? These companies are making the decisions that they believe that are in their best interests."

Salesforce Tower isn't exactly "empty," as Breed said. As early as March, the company said it saw more than 1,000 of its 10,000 local workers in the office.

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The company's annual conference Dreamforce also returned fully back in person for the first time in three years last month, bringing an estimated \$40 million in economic impact to the city.

During the conference, Breed thanked the company for bringing its gathering back and, with a laugh, urged everyone in the audience to spend their money downtown.

Salesforce did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

To boost San Francisco's economic recovery, Breed told Bloomberg she would look beyond tech and instead try to lure biotech and life sciences companies downtown.

The biotech sector, which relies on in-person lab work, remains centered around physically being in workspaces, in contrast to the remote-heavy tech sector. In

some of the only major leases of 2020, two biotech firms subleased space from

SOME OF THE ONLY MAJOR REASES OF 2020, TWO BIOTECH FIRMS SUBLEASED SPACE FROM
Dropbox in Mission Bay, after the online storage company reduced its office space.

The approved but unbuilt office projects in San Francisco's central South of Market area could seek biotech tenants instead of tech companies. But they would face stiff competition from the numerous projects being built around South San Francisco, birthplace of biotech, said Colin Yasukochi, executive director of CBRE's Tech Insights Center.

Chronicle staff writer Roland Li contributed to this report.

Mallory Moench (she/her) is a San Francisco Chronicle staff writer. Email: mallory.moench@sfchronicle.com Twitter: @mallorymoench

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She previously covered immigration and local news for the Albany Times Union and the Alabama state legislature for the Associated Press. Before that, she freelanced with a focus on the Yemeni diaspora while studying at the City University of New York Graduate School of Journalism.

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EXHIBIT R

SFIST

4 NOVEMBER 2022 / BUSINESS & TECH / JAY BARMANN

Twitter Layoffs Cut Across Many Divisions; Musk Is Whining About Activists Whom He Blames For Advertiser Exodus

The layoff sweep at Twitter was nothing if not chaotic and cruel, and after months of speculation and hollow denials about what was to come, employees are left either holding the bag or waiting to find out what their severance packages look like.

x

layoffs. "If you were going to rank order ways to upset people, telling

them you're going to do it in advance, without rationale, that is a particularly inhumane way to treat them."

As New York-based employment lawyer Peter Rahbar [says to the Associated Press](#), there's a good reason why most companies "take great care in doing layoffs of this magnitude."

"First, they want to make sure there is justification, and second that a nondiscriminatory process is used," Rahbar tells the AP. "And third, they want to do everything they can not to draw attention to it for these reasons."

New Chief Twit Elon Musk appears, predictably, not to have a gracious or thoughtful bone in his body, and this has all just been a matter of dollars and cents. He didn't even have the courage to sign his name to [the impersonal layoff notice](#) that went out to the entire company on Thursday night.

Even still, Musk declined to answer today when another oligarch,

what he said in a tweet early Friday about activist groups — some of

whom he met with over Zoom earlier this week and possibly again in the last 24 hours — who have called for boycotts by advertisers.

To Musk's mind, it's the actions of these activists, and not the instability of the company he just gutted and the uncertainties around future content moderation and hate speech, that is scaring off the advertisers.

"The activist groups have been successful in causing a massive drop in Twitter advertising revenue, and we've done our absolute best to appease them and nothing is working," Musk reportedly whined in response to Baron.

Twitter has had a massive drop in revenue, due to activist groups pressuring advertisers, even though nothing has changed with content moderation and we did everything we could to appease the activists.

Extremely messed up! They're trying to destroy free speech

Their "absolute best to appease them" seems to be just a couple of conference calls, and a pledge not to make any changes to the election integrity rules and process.

One of the organizations calling for boycotts, Free Press, was dissatisfied today with Musk's promises, noting that the layoffs were impacting workers in the content moderation department.

Jessica González, co-CEO of Free Press, tells the AP, "When you lay off reportedly 50% of your staff — including teams who are in charge of actually tracking, monitoring and enforcing content moderation and rules — that necessarily means that content moderation has changed. He cannot enforce content moderation if he doesn't have the staff to do so. AI alone cannot solve this problem."

We know that members of the communications team at Twitter were laid off, and the New York Times hasn't been able to reach anyone for comment. The [Chronicle reports](#) that a team working on "machine learning ethics, transparency, and accountability" had been laid off; also, a team devoted to combatting human rights abuses on the platform reportedly lost their jobs.

[The Verge reports](#) that the trust and safety team was hit, along with other departments including those concerned with social good, tweet curation, and data science.

Two sources in the company told the Times that the internal IT team at Twitter, "which is partly responsible for keeping the site functioning," was now "a skeleton crew" after the layoffs. The disability experience team was also reportedly gutted, as well as the "marketing, social, curation, studio and enforcement teams," per the Times.

It's a statement that disabled users aren't worth serving."

We joked yesterday about whether the team responsible for the most urgent project at the company right now — according to Musk anyway — the push to launch a paid verification system that will charge users \$8/mo for blue checkmarks and other perks, would also be hit with layoffs while Musk was making them work crazy long days to hit a Monday deadline. And yes! Per the Times, someone in the middle of a 9:30 p.m. PT meeting last night lost access to the Twitter network and abruptly dropped out of the conference call.

The only teams we haven't heard about seeing mass layoffs are in advertising and brand partnerships, though the extent of the layoffs probably won't be clear to the public for days.

San Francisco politicians, meanwhile, have been denouncing the layoffs using their own Twitter accounts.

State Senator Scott Wiener posted a statement Thursday saying that the gutting of teams concerned with trust and safety and moderation means Twitter "is likely to be a more dangerous place for LGBTQ people, Jews, people of color & anyone else who doesn't fit in with the right-wing vision for our country."

And Assemblymember Matt Haney tweeted, "Slashing jobs by the

x

Meanwhile, Mayor London Breed is telling laid off employees of Twitter and other companies to apply for one of the 5,000 open jobs at the city. Because that's probably a lateral move.

Related: Twitter Building Shuttered Until Monday as Employees Get Emailed Pink Slips; Lawsuit Filed Over Layoff Notification

Top image: Twitter headquarters stands on Market Street on November 4, 2022 in San Francisco, California. Twitter Inc reportedly began laying off employees across its departments on Friday as new owner Elon Musk is reportedly looking to cut around half of the company's workforce. (Photo by David Odisho/Getty Images)

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Aug 29, 2014 ... SpaceX CEO **Elon Musk**, right, at the return of the Dragon spacecraft with NASA chief Charles Bolden, left, on June 13, 2012.

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FEATURED

'It's gonna get a lot worse': What Musk misinfo means for Twitter's future

By Marcus White | Sr. Digital Writer | Producer

Nov 3, 2022



Elon Musk was among the users sharing dubious assertions about the attack on Paul Pelosi, alarming experts about Twitter under his direction.

Olivia Wise/The Examiner

False claims, lies and conspiracy theories spread regularly on Twitter. But this week, Elon Musk — the company's new CEO and owner — was among the users sharing dubious assertions about the attack on Paul Pelosi, husband of House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, who was attacked in the couple's San Francisco home on Friday morning.

Privacy - Terms

Several social media experts, who already feared that Twitter could become a "powder keg" for emergent conspiracy theories with the world's richest man at the helm, said Musk's sharing of false claims epitomized their concerns.

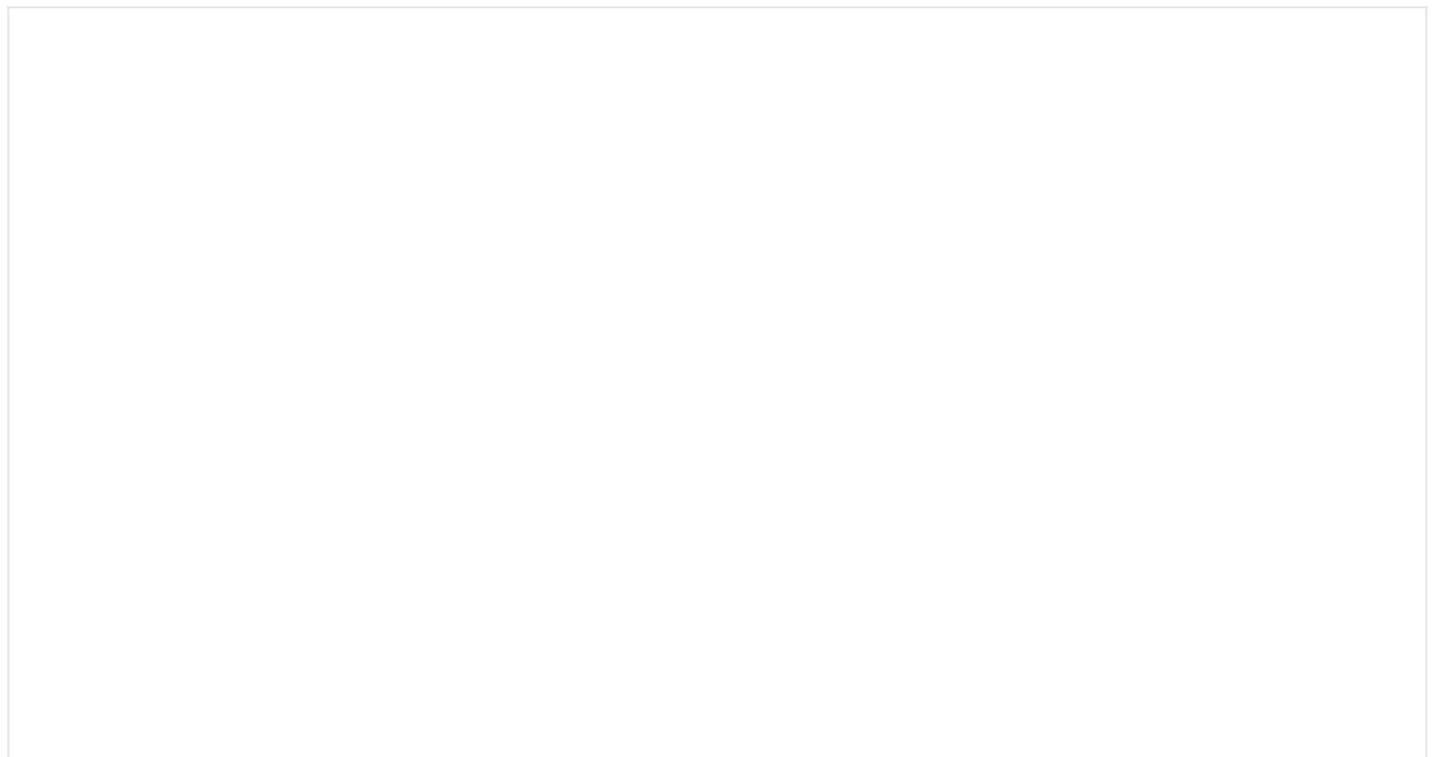
Just three days after completing his purchase of the San Francisco social media company, Musk on Sunday tweeted a homophobic conspiracy theory about the relationship between Pelosi and David DePape, the man facing federal and state charges in the attack.

Musk tweeted at Hillary Clinton that "there is a tiny possibility there might be more to this story than meets the eye." He linked to a website which previously had falsely claimed that Clinton was dead and replaced by a body double.

Musk ultimately deleted the tweet, but experts who study social media misinformation and manipulation who spoke with The Examiner were alarmed about what the deleted tweet portends for the platform under his direction.

"You've suddenly given a boost in the arm to conspiracy theorists," Rohit Chopra, an associate professor of communication at Santa Clara University, said of Musk's tweet in an interview with The Examiner.

Asked multiple questions about why Musk tweeted and deleted the conspiracy theory, Twitter didn't respond to The Examiner's request for comment prior to publication.





Despite disputed warnings, SFPD got 'no reports' of Halloween fentanyl

'Free speech' and false information

As part of his \$44 billion purchase of Twitter, Musk has previously pledged to loosen the platform's content moderation under the guise of promoting "free speech."

In an open letter to advertisers he shared from his Twitter account, Musk said he purchased the company "because it is important to the future of civilization to have a common digital town square, where a wide range of beliefs can be debated in a healthy manner, without resorting to violence."

"If it's a digital town square, that kind of speaks poorly about the town square," Chopra, who has written about the online efforts of right-wing Hindu groups and how those compare to similar movements, said of Twitter.

Within it, many prominent conservatives have spread and continue to spread misinformation and disinformation about the attack on Pelosi, from which the 82-year-old required extensive surgery.

DePape, Pelosi's alleged attacker, told police in an interview published in a federal affidavit on Monday that he used a hammer to break into a back door of the Pelosis' home, and that he planned to break "her kneecaps" unless she told the "truth."

Websites bearing his name, although never mentioning Pelosi, also included posts invoking QAnon and a number of far-right conspiracies. Officials said Pelosi didn't know DePape before Friday.

But in between the attack and DePape pleading not guilty on Tuesday, a number of leading figures on the political right posted and amplified conspiracies.

Donald Trump Jr., Louisiana Rep. Clay Higgins and far-right filmmaker Dinesh D'Souza all shared tweets referencing the homophobic conspiracy theory, which relied upon a retracted detail from a KTVU report about what DePape was wearing.

Others, including D'Souza and Georgia Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene, falsely claimed that DePape was Pelosi's friend, after an excerpt of the 911 dispatch shared on Twitter said Pelosi called DePape "a friend." The San Francisco District Attorney's Office said in court documents that DePape identified himself as "a friend of theirs" to the dispatcher.

Musk, who tweeted then deleted the aforementioned conspiracy theory, has more than 113 million followers on Twitter. That's over 100 million more than Trump Jr., D'Souza, Taylor Greene and Higgins combined.

"It does give it a sense of legitimacy," Brandie Nonnecke, the director of the U.C. Berkeley CITRIS Policy Lab, told The Examiner in an interview.

'Musk the businessman' vs. 'Musk the ideologue'

Nonnecke hypothesized that Twitter could become a "powder keg" for emergent conspiracy theories if Musk truly scales back Twitter's content moderation efforts, but she noted that he has plenty of incentive for it not to be.

Musk borrowed \$13 billion from banks to buy Twitter, and the company now owes \$1 billion in annual debt and interest payments.

Perhaps in light of this, Musk in an open letter last week sought to assure advertisers that Twitter wouldn't become "a free-for-all hellscape." He also met with a number of civil rights and advocacy groups on Tuesday, outlining "how Twitter will continue to combat hate (and) harassment (and) enforce its election integrity policies" ahead of the Nov. 8 midterm elections.

Musk also said last week that Twitter "will be forming a content moderation council with widely diverse viewpoints."

"Over the next few weeks, we are likely to witness an internal conflict between Musk the businessman and Musk the ideologue," Étienne Brown, an assistant professor of philosophy at San Jose State who focuses on the ethics of online interaction, told The Examiner in an email.

"While the latter portrays himself as a defender of free speech who squashes speech regulation, the (former) is trying to reassure advertisers that Twitter will remain tightly regulated. Musk is too unpredictable for anyone to say at this point who will win," Brown continued.



Jenkins: 6 S.F. women say alleged stalker harassed them, too

'I think it's gonna get a lot worse'

Brown said he was even more concerned about hate speech spreading on the platform than conspiracy theories, pointing to the trolls "who already feel empowered by Musk's tenure" and posted racist slurs in the aftermath of Musk completing the deal last week.

Yoel Roth, Twitter's head of safety and integrity, said just 300 accounts sent "more than 50,000" tweets "repeatedly using a particular slur" in the aftermath of Musk's purchase.

Musk also announced a new process for Twitter verification this week, raising fresh concerns when he said he wants to charge \$8 a month for users to get — and maintain — their blue checkmark. Companies, or public figures, who don't maintain their check could, conceivably, be easily impersonated. Publishers "willing to work with" Twitter would have a "paywall bypass," Musk said.

It remains to be seen whether those plans, or their corresponding concerns, come to fruition. But after the attack on Pelosi, none of the experts who spoke with The Examiner were optimistic.

"I think it's gonna get a lot worse," Nonnecke, the CITRIS Policy Lab director, said.

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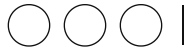
Sunday wasn't the first time Elon Musk spread misinformation on Twitter. But now he owns it



Roland Li

Updated: Oct. 31, 2022 7:16 p.m.

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Elon Musk wants to charge Twitter users \$20 a month for its subscription service. The price was formerly \$5.
Hannibal Hanschke, POOL / Associated Press

Elon Musk's now deleted [tweet on Sunday](#) linking to a baseless news article on the [attack on Paul Pelosi](#) wasn't the first time the billionaire has spread misinformation on Twitter, and it's previously sparked legal peril.

Musk's 2018 tweet [calling a cave diver "pedo guy"](#) after being rebuffed over efforts to aid rescue efforts of youths in Thailand led to a civil lawsuit, where Musk was ultimately acquitted of defamation charges. That same year, Musk gave up his chairman position at Tesla and paid \$20 million [under a settlement](#) with the Securities and Exchange Commission after tweeting that he had "funding secured" to take the company private when no such deal was in place.

The tech mogul's latest controversy came just three days after [Musk bought Twitter for \\$44 billion](#), transforming him from a power user with over 112 million followers to the person determining the social network's future, and the person with the most financial risk.

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"It's different from being a user. It's a lot of responsibility," said Ahmed Banafa, a professor of engineering at San Jose State University. "Words have consequences."

Musk dissolved Twitter's board, and the company is set to become delisted from the New York Stock Exchange on Nov. 8, making the company — and Musk — no longer accountable to independent directors or shareholders.

Banafa sees the relatively light repercussions of Musk's previously problematic tweets as feeding into a feeling for Musk that he's "untouchable" and "can say anything he wants." The SEC fine of \$20 million was a tiny fraction of Musk's more than \$220 billion net worth, for instance.

Although he's amassed total corporate power over Twitter, Musk still must contend with users and advertisers, the lifeblood of the business, said Banafa.

There are already signs that some major advertisers are skittish. General Motors has paused ads as it seeks to "understand the direction of the platform under their new ownership," [CNBC reported](#).

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Musk sought to reassure advertisers last week just before the purchase closed, writing in a letter that “Twitter obviously cannot become a free-for-all hellscape, where anything can be said with no consequences!” He also said Twitter’s content moderation policies hadn’t changed, and Yoel Roth, Twitter’s head of safety and integrity, posted last week that “Hateful conduct has no place here.”

The scale of Twitter’s moderation challenges is vast. Roth said that over 48 hours last week, nearly 300 accounts posted over 50,000 tweets using the same slur, and the company has taken steps to ban the accounts. The slur was n—, according to Network Contagion Research Institute.

The moderation challenges exacerbate already daunting financial prospects. Musk took on around \$13 billion in debt and has annual interest payments of around \$1 billion. Twitter hasn’t consistently been profitable, and now it faces declining morale, the exodus of hundreds of employees before the buyout and the prospect of deep layoffs, coupled with a downturn in digital advertising and a potential recession.

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“The \$44 billion price tag for Twitter will go down as one of the most overpaid tech acquisitions in the history of mergers and acquisition deals,” Dan Ives and John Katsingris of Wedbush Securities wrote on Friday after the deal closed. They believe the company’s fair market value is \$25 billion and Musk faces an “Everest-like uphill battle” to turn around Twitter.

In an effort to boost revenue, Musk is seeking to quadruple the cost of [Twitter’s subscription service](#) from \$4.99 per month to \$19.99 per month and also require it for users to keep their blue verification badge, [the Verge reported](#). Musk is also looking to revive Twitter’s short form video division Vine, [Axios reported](#), which could put it in more direct competition with TikTok.

Twitter users could soon have another alternative social network. Company co-founder and former CEO Jack Dorsey’s [Bluesky](#) is now taking beta testers. The nascent social network aims to be decentralized and user, rather than corporation, controlled. “It’s a competitor to any company trying to own the underlying fundamentals for social media or the data of the people using it,” [Dorsey recently said](#).

Banafa expects Twitter’s prospects to become clearer by the end of the year. For now, “someone has to remind him that he’s CEO of Twitter and he should be careful about what he’s posting,” Banafa said of Musk.

Roland Li is a San Francisco Chronicle staff writer. Email: roland.li@sfchronicle.com Twitter: [@rolandlisf](https://twitter.com/rolandlisf)

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Written By
Roland Li

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Roland Li covers commercial real estate for the business desk, focusing on the Bay Area office and retail sectors.

He was previously a reporter at San Francisco Business Times, where he won one award from the California News Publishers Association and three from the National Association of Real Estate Editors.

He is the author of "Good Luck Have Fun: The Rise of eSports," a 2016 book on the history of the competitive video game industry. Before moving to the Bay Area in 2015, he studied and worked in New York. He freelanced for the Wall Street Journal, the New York Times and other local publications. His hobbies include swimming and urban photography.

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Top of the News

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From S.F.'s opioid scourge to [Elon Musk's](#) Twitter takeover, here are the top news stories of 2022

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I just got myself banned from [Elon Musk's](#) Twitter.

December 29, 2022 | Gil Duran

I'm one of the journalists now banned from Twitter for allegedly violating new rules imposed by CEO [Elon Musk](#). ... The specifics of my ban get a little convoluted, but stay with me: Mastodon got suspended ...



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Sam Moore, SFGATE It seems no one is safe from the wrath of [Elon Musk](#) during one of his many PR fiascos since taking ownership of Twitter — and that includes San Francisco Mayor London Breed. ... [Musk](#) ...



Twitter bans NY Times, Washington Post, CNN reporters critical of [Elon Musk](#)

December 15, 2022 | Joshua Bote

This week, [Musk](#) has set arbitrary policies regarding openly available information about flights, clearly in response to popular Twitter account [@ElonJet](#)'s tracking of [Musk's](#) own private plane. ... Binder ...



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[Elon Musk](#) cameo exemplifies issues at Dave Chappelle, Chris Rock SF show

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Dave Chappelle brings out Twitter's [Elon Musk](#) at Chase Center, chaos ensues

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[Elon Musk](#) signals his support for Ron DeSantis in 2024 on Twitter

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Ro Khanna talks [Elon Musk's](#) Twitter, Kevin McCarthy, more

December 8, 2022 | Eric Ting

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Elon Musk's former Twitter right-hand man puts him on blast

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Elon Musk sacks Twitter workers who made fun of him publicly

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Commentary: In 2023, expect the unexpected — Chris Talgo

January 5, 2023 | Chris Talgo

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Twitter sued for allegedly not paying rent at San Francisco office

January 3, 2023 | Roland Li

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January 3, 2023

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Tesla, Univar fall; InterDigital, Digital Realty Trust

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The electric vehicle maker fell short of CEO [Elon Musk](#)'s pledge to grow the company's sales by 50% in 2022.

Twitter sued for not paying rent at San Francisco office building

January 3, 2023 | Alex Shultz

Alex Shultz Under the leadership of CEO [Elon Musk](#), Twitter was recently sued for not paying rent at an office space in San Francisco, according to a lawsuit filed on Dec. 29. ... Twitter also did not immediately ...



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January 2, 2023 | The Associated Press

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